

Trip Report: Dolomite Via Ferrata's Arabba

Date: 2nd-9th July 2005

Group: Jim G (leader) Scotchio (Colin Christie), Tonio (Tony Quinn), Hugh Anstee, Oranginio (Jim Walker), Jean Walker, Lesley Arrowsmith, Mike Arrowsmith, Selina Green, Gillian Grant (UK transport manager)

Route: See below

Total Distance: see below

Total Ascent: See below

Weather: See below

This is the second Alpine expedition of **Bunbury Unlimited Mountaineers**. The objective was to attempt various Via Ferrata routes in the Italian Dolomites, based in Arabba.

This is a personal diary of events as they unfolded and are not necessarily the views of all the participants!

Saturday 2nd July

Bunbury and a 7.15am start, Gillian and Frank kindly agreed to act as our chauffeurs to Liverpool Airport. We were dropped off at 8am and the squad assembled for check-in at Ryanair bound for Treviso.

Easy check-in but with Selina stunning everyone with her hold baggage only weighing 8kg! Jim G then gets bounced at security because he has his Via Ferrata device in his hand luggage, security claiming that it could be used to tie someone up. Has to traipse all the way back to check-in to have it checked into the hold. Scotchio abandons his boarding card in the Café, but he is rescued by the Chef bringing it to the gate.

We land at Treviso Airport on time 12.30 local time and pick up the hire cars, a Renault Megane estate and a Renault Scenic. We leave Treviso at 1.30 heading for Arabba and stop at a supermarket in Belluno to stock up with supplies and have some lunch. Scotchio's navigation skills come to the fore with him firstly unable to find the toilets, finding the car park instead, then secondly proceeds out of the supermarket via the wrong door! We arrive in Arabba at 5pm where we book in with Colletts and move into the two apartments. Next job is to acquire Via Ferrata kit for the whole squad at the local outdoor shop. Lesley asks "will one helmet fit us all?!" Following a round of unpacking we go out to Set Sass restaurant for a Pizza, beer and wine. Oranginio has a Pineapple Pizza! We then decamp to Scotchio's apartment (above the Pizza place) for a night cap. We are warned to park the cars across the far side of the road junction as there is a bike race due through Arabba on Sunday, when they close

the road to traffic. Plan is for an early start so bed at 10.30pm, alarm set for 6am.

Sunday 3rd July

All hell brakes loose at 6am when the church bells let loose waking us all, they then go off at 15 minute intervals until 7am when they really get going calling the devout to Mass. Takes us the best part of 40 minutes to cross the road due to the continuous stream of bikes! We eventually cross and leave Arabba at 7.45 am bound for Cortina via the Passo Falzarego. First indication of the week that Lesley's bladder has a maximum capacity of about one hour, as having finally crossed the road she has to divert to Scotchio's apartment (which is on "correct" side of road for bike race) for relief holding us up for another 10 minutes! Arrive at the Rio Gere chairlift and cable car at 8.45am and using these we emerge at the Rifugio Lorenzi then gear up and on to the Via Ferrata Marino Bianchi at 10am. The day is hot and sunny.

This a much more testing route than anticipated and the squad cope very well with the variety of techniques required and as it is very popular route, there are traffic jams in places. It takes us about 3hours to reach the summit in glorious sunshine, where we have a brief lunch break before reversing the route back to the Rifugio Lorenzi in approx 2.5 hours. On the way down Scotchio decides to ditch some of Hugh's gear and drops a sling and carabiner! Jim declines his invitation to go down for it! Back at the Rifugio Lorenzi everyone is delighted to have survived. Mike and Selina go up to pose on the suspension bridge on the Via Ferrata Ivano Dibona, much to Oranginio's chagrin.

The Rifugio Lorenzi toilets are deemed to be unacceptable so Oranginio, Jean and Lesley take the cable car back to the Rifugio Son Forca to use theirs. The rest of us settle down to a well earned beer, big beers for all except Tonio and Hugh who end up drinking from a small glass boot! We return to Arabba for recovery, G&T's on the terrace at 8pm followed by a Pizza (Scotchio has another small beer!) the hardened drinkers continue with big beers in Café Peter's bar until chucking out time, and so to bed.

Monday 4th July

The bloody Church bells loose off at 6am and chime every quarter hour until 7am when they go mad (28 chimes times two!) we get up at 8am. We leave at 10.30am for an easier day and drive up to Corvara and then to the Passo Gardena. We turn right up a small rough track (rental cars feel no pain) past a gesticulating workman to the Dantercepies cable car

station. The chosen route is the Via Ferrata Grand Cir a fairly modest outing following the previous day's expenditure of energy and adrenalin. The route traverses across to a broken white marble cross before proceeding up a steep chossy gully to the start of the Via Ferrata. We gear up at the start of the wire, which proves to be unnecessary as it is a series of rubble strewn rock ledges but the wire is useful as a hand rail. At the end of the wire the route zig-zags fairly steeply up to a second wire and then a path/scrambling leads to the summit of Grand Cir at 2592m which is adorned by a large metal cross. We have a very pleasant lunch in the sunshine admiring the extensive views. Lesley's fine quotes come thick and fast "Mike is your shutter up?" Mike tells Lesley to shutter up. Lesley "what is all that brown stuff?" answer rock! We reverse the route and arrive back at the cars to find that a kind local Italian person has decided to try and box us in with his truck. But by using all Mike's driving skills (with a slight bump of a JCB) we manage to escape! We stop over in Corvara for a beer (some go shopping to the closed shops) others have another beer.

The English guide book has a route called the Via Ferrata Vallon on Piz Boe but it says that the bridge across the waterfall is down and has not been replaced from at least 2 years ago and to check locally, so we go into the Tourist Information Office to enquire. The team interpreter, Tonio, manages to establish that our book is not kaput but the Via Ferrata bridge is ok, more of this later!

We returned to Arabba to chill, except for the fitness freaks that go out running! (Scotchio crocks himself trying to out run Oranginio).

Lesley and Jean cook dinner for all at our apartment, which turns into a major feast, washed down with G&T's, wine and beer. We then trek up to the Stube Bar only to find out it is closed on Monday's; we go to the Sport Hotel Bar for one beer. The forecast for Tuesday is very poor with snow down to 2800m plus thunder and lightning. Our original plan is for a route on Piz Boe near Corvara, found out the cable car doesn't operate on Tuesday's anyway!

We have a rethink and choose a bad weather route instead.

Tuesday 5th July

Awoken by the bloody bells at 6am! The rain is lashing down but no thunder or lightning. Our chosen route is the Via Ferrata down the Lagazoui Tunnels high above the Falzarego Pass. Selina and Scotchio have to go and purchase head torches! A bargain at only 6 Euros each!

We leave at 10.30am and drive up to the Passo Falzarego and take the cable car to the Rifugio Lagazuoi. We exit into a Scottish blizzard, and wait for the usual suspects who have to go to the toilet in the Rifugio. We descend down a narrow path to the start of the tunnels where we don helmets (Jim has his on back to front!), head torches and gloves. We descend into the dark and although the rock is slippery the wire provides a good hand rail to help stay upright. We pass various relics and artefacts from the First World War. Near the bottom of the tunnel we arrive at the Martini Ledge and this traverses right across the face of the mountain and is littered with old barracks and buildings from the war. We find a nice sheltered spot where we can eat our lunch and watch the steady snow fall and gaze into the void. We then continue round the ledge before retracing our steps back to the tunnel. We continue to the end of the tunnel and follow a winding path back to the Passo Falzarego for a cold beer and to dry off.

Our Renault Scenic has a crazy amount of electronics stuff in it and for a couple of days we have been getting a warning message and alarm, in Italian, particularly when going down hill and braking round right hand bends. Our collective Italian is such that we don't have a clue what it is saying! We decide to stop at the Renault garage in Arabba to find out what the problem is. Tonio, his best broken Italian/German, gets the mechanic to have a look. It seems we are low on Brake Fluid, which he duly tops up for 6 Euros.

We return to the apartment to find a note from some of Jim and Hugh's old climbing muckers who are in town as they were in the area climbing on the Marmolada. We met up with them for a beer in Café Peter's bar. They then went off to their B&B while we went to a restaurant for a meal. Hugh and I then met them again in the Café Peter's bar for a few beers and to relive old times, until we got thrown out!

Wednesday 6th July

Woken by the bloody bells at 6am, eventually get up at 6.45am and get away at 8.25am. We drive north to Corvara to get the Piz Boe cable car, where Oranginio finds he has forgotten his socks; luckily Jean has a spare pair and can therefore dress him properly! This cable car then connects with the Vallon Chairlift which whisks us high up into the mountains in glorious sunshine, with fantastic views all round and especially of the Marmolada. From the top of the chairlift we follow a beautiful alpine path into the Il Vallon, and we keep looking for evidence that the bridge across the waterfall is intact, but we can't see anything. The Ill Vallon has a wild and remote feel to it and in 40 minutes we arrive at the start of the Via

Ferrata Vallon. The first 200 metres were excellent climbing on good rock with excellent protection. Then we arrive at the point where the bridge crosses the waterfall and the route continues up the right hand side. Well the bridge is a pile of metal slats, sitting on our side of the waterfall, with no way across! It is clear that they have given up on the bridge and a new wire disappears up the very steep wall directly above us, not crossing the waterfall. The wall above is vertical and causes a fair amount of consternation amongst some members of the squad! Hugh leads off and after a fair amount of nervous discussion, blind panic and the threat of a mini rebellion we proceed to climb the wall. This turns out to be about 40 feet high and nearly vertical! However the holds are very good and solid and there is a wire to help protect the hardest moves. The entire squad make it to the top of the wall where the Via Ferrata finishes and everyone is rightly chuffed as it is easily the hardest rock climbing most of them have ever done. Above the Via Ferrata the views are fantastic and I am amazed by the amount of fresh snow. We follow a faint path above which eventually takes us to the fore summit of Piz Boe where we re-group for lunch and to admire the views. We decide to give the summit of Piz Boe a miss and head down path 672, the Cresta Sentra, down climb the Via Ferrata Lichtenfelser Steig which takes us back towards the Vallon chairlift. The squad then split into two with Jim, Tonio, Scotchio, Oranginio, Selina and Lesley opting to walk back down path 637 to Arabba, stopping on route at the Rifugio Col Du Burz for a cold beer. Mike runs Jim back to Corvara (took two attempts due to forgetting the car keys!) to pick up one of the cars. We ate in the German restaurant, with one very miserable sour faced waitress, and finished off in Café Peter's bar for a few more beers with the climbing bunch.

Thursday 7th July

Woken by the bloody bells at 6am! Leisurely start and away at 8.30 with a drive over the Passo Falzarego to Cortina and on to a car park just beyond the Punta Fiammes Hotel. A very pleasant path is followed for 45 minutes to the start of the Via Ferrata Barbara and the Via Ferrata Lucio Dalaiti. Donning helmets, gloves and waterproofs the path descends down to the Cascade Val di Fanes and the path and wire go behind the waterfall, getting soaked in the process, then scrambling down a path and ladder to the bottom of the lower Cascade. Crossing a metal bridge we joined the Via Ferrata Lucio Dalaiti and we decide to gear up as the path is very exposed and has some steep rock steps. The climb back up is completed without incident and finishes back where we started. We then decide to

go back down the Via Ferrata Barbara as there is a path up the opposite side of the gorge to a view point above the Cascade which goes up a very steep zig-zag path constructed from logs. We return to the cars with a pleasant walk through the forest, the Lido bar is closed, so no cold beer, but it now starts to rain with a vengeance. We decide to have a look round Cortina but it is shut and pouring with rain so we drive back to Arabba for a Pizza and well earned cold beer, we hear about the bombs in London! It is still raining strongly so Jim, Tonio, Scotchio and Selina decide to drive to Corvara for presie shopping returning at 5.30pm. We decide to go to Mikys grill for dinner only to find out that it is fish evening with a choice of only two courses, but after a bit of discussion we decide we can't be bothered to move anywhere else and stay put. Lesley asks "how do they get the fish here?" answer "in trucks, like everywhere else"! It turns out to be the best meal yet, the food is excellent, apart from Lesley's dodgy tomatoes (see Friday's report). Back to Café Peter's bar to see the climbing crew, too many Weiss Beers but bed at 12pm.

Friday 8th July

Woken by the bloody bells at 6am! There has been a big snowfall overnight with snow down below the tree line behind the church. But the weather is bright and sunny. A leisurely start with a short drive down the valley to the little village of Corte. The route starts with a long flog up steep grassy slopes (acca the How Gills, so Scotchio feels at home) across beautiful Alpine meadows before emerging at the Col della Roda. The path then zig-zags up the mountain side and eventually emerges on to the summit of Cima Sief 2424m. We regroup here to tackle the Via Ferrata Col di Lana, which descends to a col over another subsidiary top and on to the summit of the Col di Lana. This proves to be easy with a good path, a few stemples, protected by a wire which is used as a handrail. Certainly puffing a bit by the time we emerge of the summit of Col di Lana 2452m which is adorned by a big cross. The summit also has a church and numerous war memorials, testament to the fact this was the scene of much activity in the First World War. We have lunch on the summit but as the weather is threatening we beat a hasty retreat back the way we came as far as the Col della Roda. Lesley has to make two serious toilet stops, borrowing paper from Jim G, due to last night's dodgy tomatoes! We decide on a different descent route back to the cars and after following a feint path, which eventually peters out, we get hopelessly lost in the forest. After a lot of aimless wandering up, down and sideways, we emerge on the right track to return to the cars.

We return to Arabba for beers and Gelato, return the hired Ferrata gear to the Sports Shop, and a few more beers. Have a look in at an Estate Agent to get a feel for property prices. The only one in Arabba is a 3 bed 2 bath apartment in a Chalet (magnificent position) for a mere 500,000 Euros! We dine at Sat Sess restaurant for the famous Anti-Doping Pizza, much wine, grappa and beer. Scotchio is awarded the "Golden Marmot Trophy" for being the outstanding plonker of the week! We return to Café Peter's bar for a few more drinks and to celebrate Scotchio's award.

Saturday 5th July

Going home day, so have breakfast and finish clearing up the apartment and packing gear. We leave at 8.30am and with a stop for petrol and a snack (does Lesley really like a glass of hot milk?) we arrive back at Treviso Airport at 11.30am. We return the cars and check in for our flight which departs a bit behind schedule but lands in Liverpool bang on time. We are picked up by Gillian and Amanda and return to Bunbury after a fantastic trip.

Jim G